

12,000 trips and counting!

For any long time resident of Clark County you have a mostly hate relationship with the Interstate Bridge as I do. Over the years I have done the commute, the reverse commute, delivery truck runs, more business meetings in Portland than I can count, not to mention that quick trip to save on sales tax, and the  accidents on the bridge, and I won't talk about the hours sitting contemplating the meaning of life in traffic. With that said, we face a decision that will affect our lives today and our community's vitality tomorrow.

The statistics are well documented. You know the bridge is unsafe to drive. The lanes are too narrow, there are no shoulders for emergencies, and the interchanges are more a kin to "Mr. Toads Wide Ride" at Disneyland. The bottom line, accident rates on the bridge and its approaches are twice that of any other section of Interstate in the State of Washington.

But what of tomorrow? Yes the bridge may survive an earth quake. But most likely it would have to be torn down and rebuilt. I do not have much confidence in a bridge built at the turn of the century on wood pilings. Yes, lately it seems like there is less traffic because of the high cost of gas. Given America's ability to adapt to change I have no doubt we will eventually be driving electric, hybrid, or hydrogen vehicles, and the traffic counts will continue to climb.

What is your American dream? A big part of mine is a job! The Portland-Vancouver area economy is more transportation-dependent than most US cities our size. The value of the goods moving in and out of our warehouses and distribution systems is over \$363 billion per year. This in turn supports about 132,000 jobs. In fact, if we don't act to invest in our transportation infrastructure, we risk losing up to 6,500 jobs per year by 2025, according to the 2005 Cost of Congestion report prepared by the Economic Development Research Group.

About 64 percent of commodities moving in and through our region do so by truck. That number is expected to grow to 73 percent in the next 20 years. Modernizing I-5 and the Interstate Bridge is critical to ensuring that these trucks have safe and efficient access to their markets. Doing nothing is not an option, unless we want to watch as congestion on I-5 creeps to 15 hours each weekday in the next 20 years. This costs us all. Producers have to run more trucks or deliver fewer products, which we all pay for in the price of the goods we consume.

Columbia River Crossing's purpose is to fix the problems on I-5. The elements that matter to business include replacing the bridge across the Columbia River and making major improvements at Marine Drive for trucks traveling to and from the Port of Portland. The ramp improvements in Vancouver will maintain access to the port, as well as eliminate backups on neighborhood streets.

There will be vast improvements for trip travel times and freight mobility in 2030, due to fewer hours of daily congestion. Freight delay will go down about 60 percent (as opposed to doing nothing) and afternoon travel times will go down about 40 percent, making trips faster for cars and trucks alike.

There is no free ride. And yes a new bridge is a whole lot of money. The financial plan for the bridge includes a unique opportunity for federal funds, State of Washington and Oregon funds and the hated word tolls. The current bridge was built with tolls. The inflation adjusted toll is not much different than a toll on the new bridge.

We need to replace the bridge, we can not afford to do nothing, and we deserve a better future for our community.

Bob Byrd
Commuter
Truck Driver
Business Owner